UNITED
NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.295
25 January 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fifteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 295th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 22 January 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Office of Conference and Support Services, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

96-80128 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Second and third periodic reports of Cuba (continued) (CEDAW/C/CUB/2-3 and Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Ferrer Gomez (Cuba) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Ms. AQUIJ said that the recession in Cuba, exacerbated by the trade embargo, had led to an increase in social ills. The embargo had created difficult conditions for women and children. Cuba had, however, done much to secure recognition of the right to development. Economic growth and development were closely linked to the advancement of women.

3. She noted that infringement of the right to equality was a crime in Cuba, and asked how many women had taken advantage of the relevant provisions. In that connection the report made no mention of violence against women.

4. Noting that the Federation of Cuban Women was the only non-governmental organization representing women's interests, she said that it could not possibly deal with all the issues. If there were a larger number of non-governmental organizations, they would be able to help women in specific areas, including prostitution, which was becoming a major concern in Cuba. While much progress had been made in terms of political representation and decision-making, real political power still lay with men, an issue that should be addressed.

Article 2

5. Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE asked how many women had initiated legal proceedings or filed complaints in respect of violations of the provisions of the Convention and whether judges received any special training to deal with such matters.

Article 3

6. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING, noting that structural adjustment policies generally worked to the detriment of women, said that she would welcome statistics on the impact of such measures on women in Cuba. The concept of a non-governmental organization serving as the national machinery for promoting women raised the question of how it actually operated and how the Federation of Cuban Women ensured that its recommendations were implemented by the Government.

Articles 5 and 6

7. Ms. AYKOR asked whether the Federation of Cuban Women was a policy-making or policy-implementing body. The report indicated that social attitudes in Cuba were deeply rooted, which generally meant that women were treated as a secondary class. Accordingly it would be of interest to know whether the Ministry of Education and the Federation of Cuban Women were working to eradicate

traditional attitudes and stereotypes by revising books and other material used in schools, as had been done in Turkey.

8. Ms. BUSTELLO GARCIA DEL REAL expressed her solidarity with the people of Cuba in the face of the trade embargo. The improvement in the gross domestic product revealed by the latest economic statistics suggested that the situation of women would ease in the future.

9. While much had been done in Cuba to combat stereotypes, there was a need for more data on, for example, violence against women, so as to understand the real situation and facilitate action. It appeared that efforts thus far had focused on changing the attitudes of women rather than those of men; that approach required revision. The suggestion that domestic violence did not exist in Cuba was surprising. More information was needed to determine whether that was, in fact, the case and, if not, how it could be combated.

10. With regard to sexually oriented violence, she wished to know whether victims of sexual assault must bring charges themselves or whether prosecution was initiated automatically.

11. The report seemed to suggest that prostitution was a phenomenon linked to tourism; it would, however, be helpful to have more details on the subject - who was involved in the practice, both men and women, and how such individuals were dealt with. She asked whether any programmes were being implemented to prevent AIDS among those engaged in prostitution, in particular, minors.

12. There had been suggestions that women had been persecuted for engaging in trade union activities, given which she asked how trade unions were organized and what degree of participation by women there was.

13. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that it was impossible to believe that there was no domestic violence in Cuba. A similar claim had been made in the former German Democratic Republic, but it had become apparent after reunification that that was untrue. The issue related to a patriarchal structure and not to any economic system. The Cuban authorities should address what was a painful issue for any society.

Article 7

14. Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE asked how the Federation of Cuban Women, as a political organization, could influence policy-making and ensure that women's concerns were articulated in public policy, and what its relationship was with the judicial authorities. She also wished to know how many non-governmental organizations in Cuba included women and how many were not affiliated with the Federation.

15. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that the level of political representation of women was deplorable, and asked whether the Federation was guaranteed seats on political bodies and, if so, how many.

Article 10

16. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that gains had been made in the area of education and that school enrolment rates were satisfactory. Women were entering careers that had traditionally been followed by men. She requested more information - particularly regarding course content - on the occupational training centres for women who had not completed school. With respect to literacy campaigns, she said that revolutionary regimes tended to stress ideological rather than functional literacy, which was what women really needed. More information would be welcome.

17. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that the number of women in non-traditional disciplines was surprising, and asked how Cuba had engineered that state of affairs. She also wondered whether jobs in areas that attracted women tended to be lower paid than in other areas.

Article 11

18. Ms. MAKINEN said that she would welcome more up-to-date unemployment statistics and information on whether the levels were the same for women and men. She wondered whether the eight-month Government-mandated maternity leave for mothers could be shared with the father. It would also be interesting to learn whether more women than men had part-time employment in Cuba, as was the case in many countries. The statement that women received the same salary for the same work called for clarification in the light of article 11, which called for equal treatment in respect of work of equal value.

19. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING inquired whether men and women who were self-employed entrepreneurs were protected by social security. She would also like to receive detailed gender-disaggregated unemployment statistics covering the redistribution of newly created jobs among men and women and whether more women than men had lost jobs.

20. While she agreed that women were not directly discriminated against in respect of employment, she would like to see a discussion, in future reports, of how the Government and the Federation of Cuban Women understood the concept of indirect discrimination; for example, whether pay was lower in employment sectors with a high concentration of women.

Article 12

21. Ms. LIN Shangzhen asked whether any educational campaigns had been undertaken to prevent teenage pregnancies and what role the mass media was playing in efforts to eliminate the tradition of machismo.

22. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that she would welcome further analysis of the reasons for the apparent wide fluctuations in abortion rates from year to year.

Articles 14 and 16

23. Ms. BARE drew attention to paragraph 173 of CEDAW/C/CUB/2-3/Add.1, pointing out that to regard women's work as one further domestic chore was, in effect,

discrimination. Moreover, paragraph 178 appeared to imply that women had access to credit only through their husbands.

24. Turning to article 16, she wondered whether efforts to raise awareness had resulted in any positive change in equalizing social relations at the household level.

25. Ms. FERRER GOMEZ (Cuba), replying to questions posed by Committee members, said that the Federation of Cuban Women had been founded by the women of Cuba themselves, and, for 35 years, it had provided effective representation for its 3.5 million members. It differed somewhat from women's organizations in other socialist countries in that it had a grass-roots base. There were over 74,000 local groups and they carried out activities at the local level in response to local conditions and needs. Its leadership was democratically elected, from the grass-roots level all the way to its national structure. The organization provided an ongoing evaluation of the status of women in Cuba. Any woman who wished to do so could join: its policies covered workers, peasants, housewives and youth, to name but a few. The Federation's funds came from membership dues.

26. At the municipal level, the Federation of Cuban Women held regular meetings with government, party and legislative officials. The organization did not take administrative decisions, but its advice and opinions carried much weight and many of its proposals had been carried out. It examined legislation touching all sectors of society from a woman's viewpoint, and could propose amendments to such laws as well as propose original legislation.

27. With regard to Cuba's reservation in respect of article 29 of the Convention, which called for the settlement of disputes by international arbitration through the International Court of Justice, she said that the Government of Cuba preferred to resolve such matters through dialogue.

28. Referring to the legislative measures applied to the crime of rape, she said that the Criminal Code applied different penalties according to the circumstances of the crime. If force or intimidation was used, the victim was mentally incapacitated or unable to understand the consequences of her actions, or unable to resist, sentences ranged from 4 to 10 years' imprisonment. If the crime was perpetrated by two or more persons, or if the perpetrator was a repeat offender, the penalty was 7 to 15 years. If the victim was under 12 years of age or was severely injured, the sentence ranged from 8 to 20 years; the death penalty could also be imposed in such cases. Victims were required to file a complaint in person, whatever their age.

29. She had not meant to imply that domestic violence did not exist in Cuba, merely that it was not as serious a problem as in some other countries. There was no tradition of domestic violence in Cuba, and it was not generally condoned by society. Where it did occur, however, steps were being taken to remedy the problem.

30. In conclusion, she conveyed the gratitude of her Government for the solidarity expressed by Committee members with regard to the United States blockade.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.